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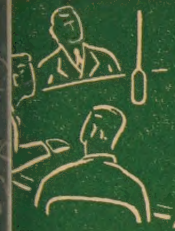

Round Table

NATIONAL RESOURCES: PROGRESS AND POVERTY

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An NBC Radio Discussion by

EDWARD ACKERMAN, WILLIAM VOGT
and GILBERT WHITE

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National Resources: Progress and Poverty

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MR. ACKERMAN: President Truman, in his Inaugural Address, called upon this country to embark upon a bold, united program for making the benefits of American scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas of the world. He called it an effort for the achievement of peace, plenty, and freedom. This program may well be one of the most significant opportunities of our lifetime for building a stable world. Through it, we can prove that we believe in a new world. As a citizen, I am much interested in this subject; but I am also aware of the problems it raises for the United States and the United States' resources. Have we the resources to do it? Should we? Can we afford it? Will it mean lowering our living standards? How will it affect each citizen?

Vogt, what are some of the principal aspects of the Truman proposal in your view?

MR. VOGT: President Truman's bold new program is one which I heartily applaud—in fact, I outlined a similar plan in my book. But I feel that it must be developed with far greater wisdom than we, or any other people, have displayed in the past. Otherwise it may turn into a Frankenstein monster and do great damage both to the peoples of the world and to their resources through destructive exploitation of these resources and by encouraging populations to outrace the possibility of production.

MR. WHITE: I share Vogt's concern that this bold new program unless properly planned may do more harm than good in some areas of great population pressure, such as eastern Asia. Yet, I feel that we cannot dodge the heavy moral responsibility which rests upon all citizens of the world to help solve the problem. The responsibility is especially heavy for people of the United States with its rich resources, both natural and scientific. We should not forget that in the United States

we are distressingly slow in applying this wealth of scientific knowledg which it is proposed we share with others, to our own country in co serving our resources for the use of the American people.

MR. ACKERMAN: President Truman has made a proposal to the worl to use American resources and know-how to develop world standar of living. Can the United States carry out such a program? Where d we stand in this country? Have we exhausted our own resources, an can we really afford this world-wide program? How much do we pa for our high standard of living in terms of our resources?

MR. VOGT: It seems to me that we pay plenty and that White mad a good point in saying that we are not treating our own resources a well as we should. We have built our high standard of living in a larg part through wearing them out: by cutting our forces destructively by going through our native game and timber; by using up the virgi fertility of much of our soils. And now we are trying to prime th pump with improved technology. This increases the cost of capita management, and labor. We are doing a good job, but it is expensiv

MR. WHITE: But do you think, Vogt, that by drawing down ou resources we are putting ourselves in a position where we will not b able to maintain our high standard of living?

MR. VOGT: I think that there is a real danger of it but that it need n be so. We certainly know enough to change the trend. As to the rel tionship of this to the rest of the world, it seems to me that we ha no choice—that it simply makes good sense as well as being an ethic thing to do to help other areas. But we have got to change the tren here at home. We are cutting our saw timber 50 per cent faster tha we are growing it. Between 1934 and 1945 it decreased 14 per cent. I ha just traveled ten thousand miles through the United States and sa vast wasted areas of land.

MR. WHITE: You think that that means a hopeless picture so f as maintaining our resources of wood for needs in the United Stat in the future?

MR. VOGT: It is not hopeless, but we are not very bright about it. W have had a Forest Service for fifty years, which has done a magnifice technical job, but we have never backed them up enough to stop t drain on the basic resource.

MR. WHITE: I suppose that all our resources are in about the same situation, are they not? Is it not true that we have not been very smart about our use of them and that we are letting them drain away at a rate which is far too rapid? Take water—last summer I was out in Southern California and Arizona, where we are draining down the ground-water resources faster than they are being built up. Really, the future economic life of those areas is dependent upon finding some way of building up again, or supplementing, those water supplies.

MR. VOGT: That is certainly true. And next to water, or perhaps before water, our most important resource is the soil.

MR. WHITE: I would agree with that.

MR. VOGT: We have destroyed, for practical purposes of cultivation, at the present time one hundred million acres of our best land and have to some degree eroded or badly damaged another two hundred million acres.

MR. WHITE: Yet, Mr. Vogt, our agricultural production is at its highest in history. Does that not contradict your contention that we are destroying the land?

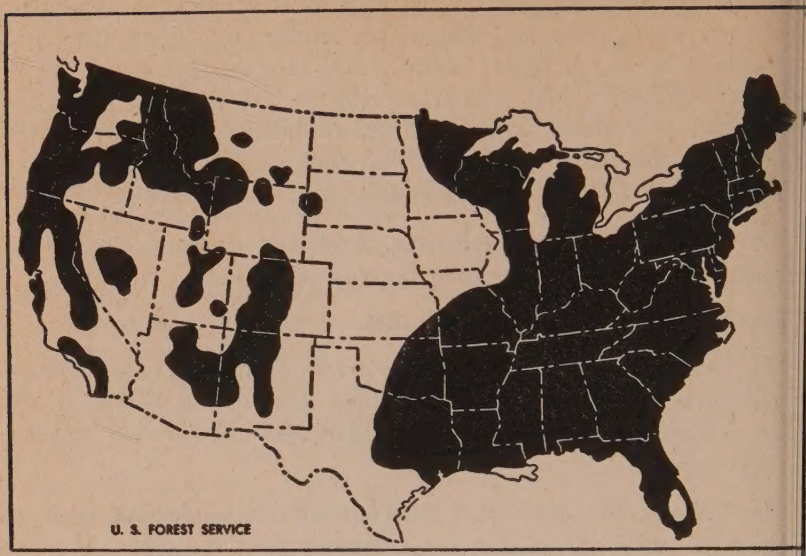
MR. VOGT: No, it does not. It is merely, as I said, that we are priming the pump—taking out of the land we have left more effectively than we did in the past. But as Senator Anderson, then Secretary of Agriculture, said some years ago, we are doing it by murderous practices in certain areas.

MR. WHITE: It seems to me that a very good example of what Vogt means is found in our Great Plains. You remember that in the 1930's we looked upon that as a dust-bowl area which was being destroyed. Yet, during the war, with very favorable climatic conditions, we had a tremendous production of wheat and are still having it. But we cannot count on that area to go on producing at this high rate in future periods of dry weather, can we?

MR. ACKERMAN: At some time in the future we probably can expect another drought on the Plains. When that comes, certainly our total agricultural production is going to decline.

MR. VOGT: In 1947, the only bad weather year we had of the 1940's,

UNITED STATES VIRGIN FORESTS, 1620



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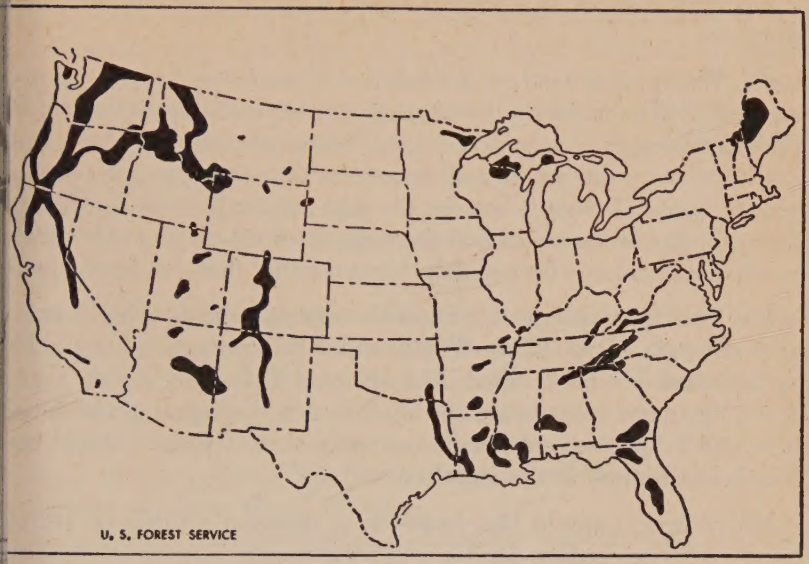
the corn crop in the Corn Belt plummeted one billion bushels. Wh about the mineral situation? That is even more serious.

MR. ACKERMAN: I think that in the case of minerals, the United Stat is certainly not what it once was. We still produce great quantities minerals—in fact, in some cases more than ever before—but the list minerals which are abundant is surprisingly short. An official of t Geological Survey recently described the mineral situation in somewh the following terms: We have abundant supplies of coal, of phospha of iron, of molybdenum. We have a supply of approximately twen years in sight for copper, zinc, aluminum, gold, and petroleum, wi the possibility of discoveries which will add to our reserves in the ca of petroleum, and somewhat lesser possibilities for the metals. We ha a supply of ten years or less of lead, manganese, and vanadium. A we have negligible supplies of platinum, antimony, mercury, tungste chromium, nickel, tin, mica, graphite, asbestos, diamonds, and quar crystals, which are important, of course, in radio and radar. You c

UNITED STATES VIRGIN FORESTS, 1940



Ibid.

ee that that is quite a long list of deficiencies. And, as time goes on, ur demands for a variety of minerals are increasing.

MR. WHITE: But as we talk about our resources and our population, lo we not need to remember that there is a third factor—technology perating here? Take the case of soils. It has been estimated by a Cornell agronomist that, in the United States, if we bring or help bring he farmers across the country to adopt the farm practices of the best 0 per cent of the farmers in their counties, we would be able to increase ur present food production about 50 to 75 per cent. That is, by making r applying technological improvements, we can greatly increase the tility of a given resource.

MR. VOGT: Of course, that is what the Department of Agriculture has een trying to do for years through the Extension Service, and especially hrough the Soil Conservation Service. But you remember the old story f the farmer who said, "Don't tell me how to farm any better. I don't arm as good now as I know how to." That attitude is characteristic not

only of the farmer—it is characteristic of most of us in our work. And it seems to me that this human factor is the big "if" in the whole situation.

MR. WHITE: It certainly is. I think that it is a factor in our own government. Take the field of water development. Probably one of the big problems there is competition among federal agencies for the responsibility to carry out work, and sometimes that seems to get ahead of considerations of what is best for the area involved, as in the Missouri Basin. In fact, we have reached the stage there where we might almost say that our plans are for overdevelopment rather than for development.

MR. VOGT: I am delighted to know that one may mention books on the University of Chicago ROUND TABLE; and in this connection I would like to recommend a book called *The Missouri Valley,* by Rufus Terral. It is an extremely interesting and illuminating discussion of this whole area, and I think every American, certainly every taxpayer, should read it to orient himself in the months ahead.

MR. WHITE: I would like, however, to question a thesis of Terrall's book—that one needs to develop a valley authority in order to make the best uses of the resources of that area. Probably we should not take much time on that now, but I know you have been working on that problem yourself, Ackerman.

MR. ACKERMAN: You did not mean to imply that a valley authority had not proved itself to be a good thing, as in the case of the Tennessee Valley?

MR. WHITE: I think it may have proved itself in the Tennessee Valley. I think it does not necessarily follow that, because that has been the best measure there, it will be the best measure in the Missouri Basin, or the Columbia Basin, and certainly not necessarily in other parts of the world.

MR. ACKERMAN: In my opinion, the Tennessee Valley is really representative of an idea—the integrated administration of regional resources—and whatever the name we use for it, I think that it has been proved to be a saving and to improve production in the area with which it has been concerned.

MR. WHITE: As such, fine—yes.

MR. ACKERMAN: Vogt, you mentioned, earlier in our discussion, that what we do here in the United States with our resources is intimately tied up with the rest of the world. In the same degree, I take it that what the rest of the world does vitally concerns us. What are the world prospects? Is there enough to feed, clothe, and raise world living standards? What does the rest of the world look like? And why are people in many parts of the world today starving? Is the situation actually getting worse as journalists lead us to believe at times? And what can the United States do about this?

This is a long series of questions, but I know that your opinions are very definite.

MR. VOGT: Well, it seems to me that what we do here in the United States is absolutely vital to the rest of the world. In the first place, the United States is one of the few areas that can fill in the food gaps. A stable economy here is going to have such an impact on the rest of the world that, even if it were not necessary to ourselves, it would be necessary to keep us from getting into very serious difficulties. That, of course, is tied up with wise use of resources.

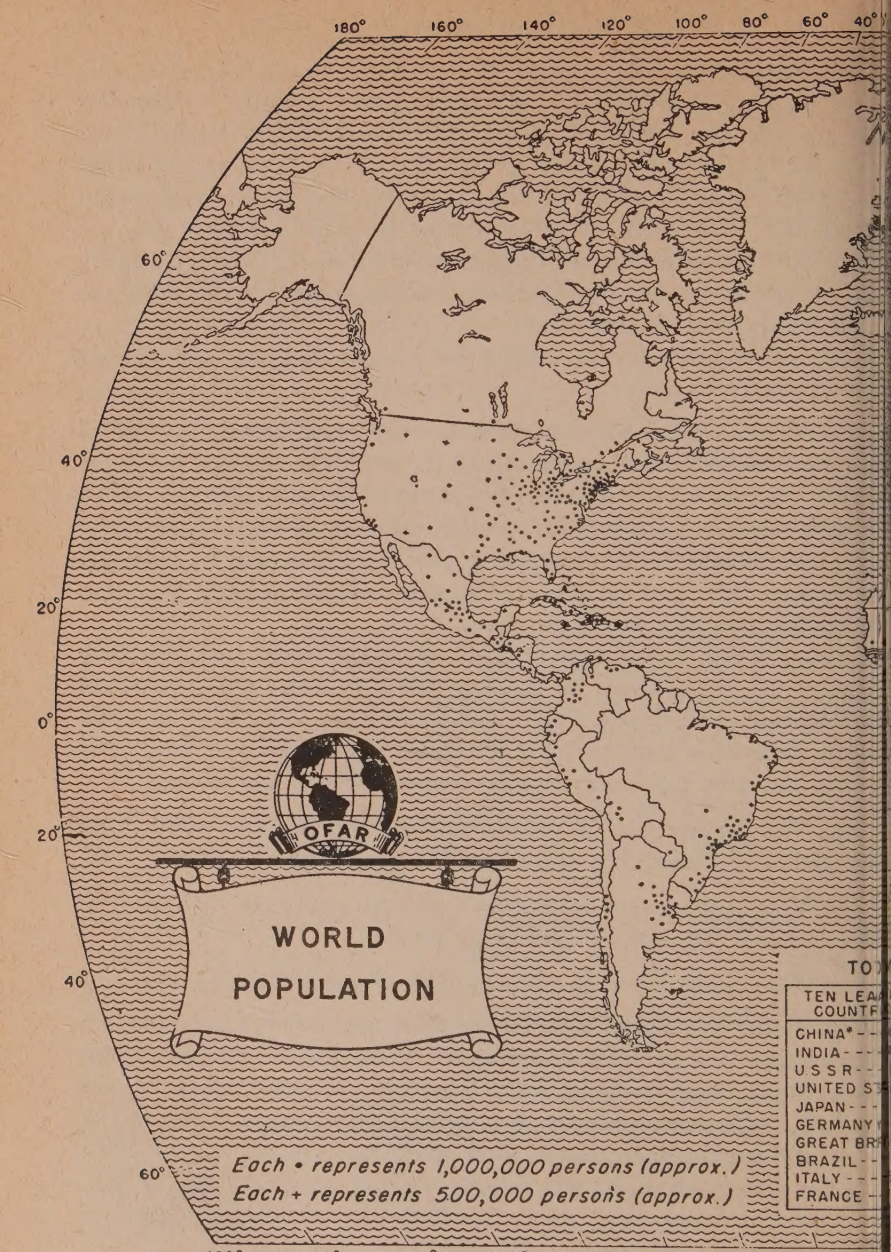
We are one of the great reservoirs of research and education. We have some of the best facilities for training people in better use of resources and the land. And, finally, a point that we very often forget is that we do a great deal of our farming in the cities here. We manufacture fertilizers; we manufacture machinery; we develop techniques, and so on.

MR. WHITE: Are you suggesting that you feel that the world could not feed itself without the help of the United States?

MR. VOGT: I think that the world cannot feed itself even with the help of the United States, at a decent living standard.

MR. ACKERMAN: What do you consider a decent living standard?

MR. VOGT: Well, somewhat better than the carbohydrate diet that characterizes so much of the Orient—a fair amount of protein and protective foods, and so on. Sir John Boyd Orr estimated, when he was head of FAO, that to achieve such a diet for the people of the world, we would need to increase our food production 110 per cent by 1960; and the way much of the world looks there is not much hope of that. Of course, it is not only a matter of food—the whole environment is involved.



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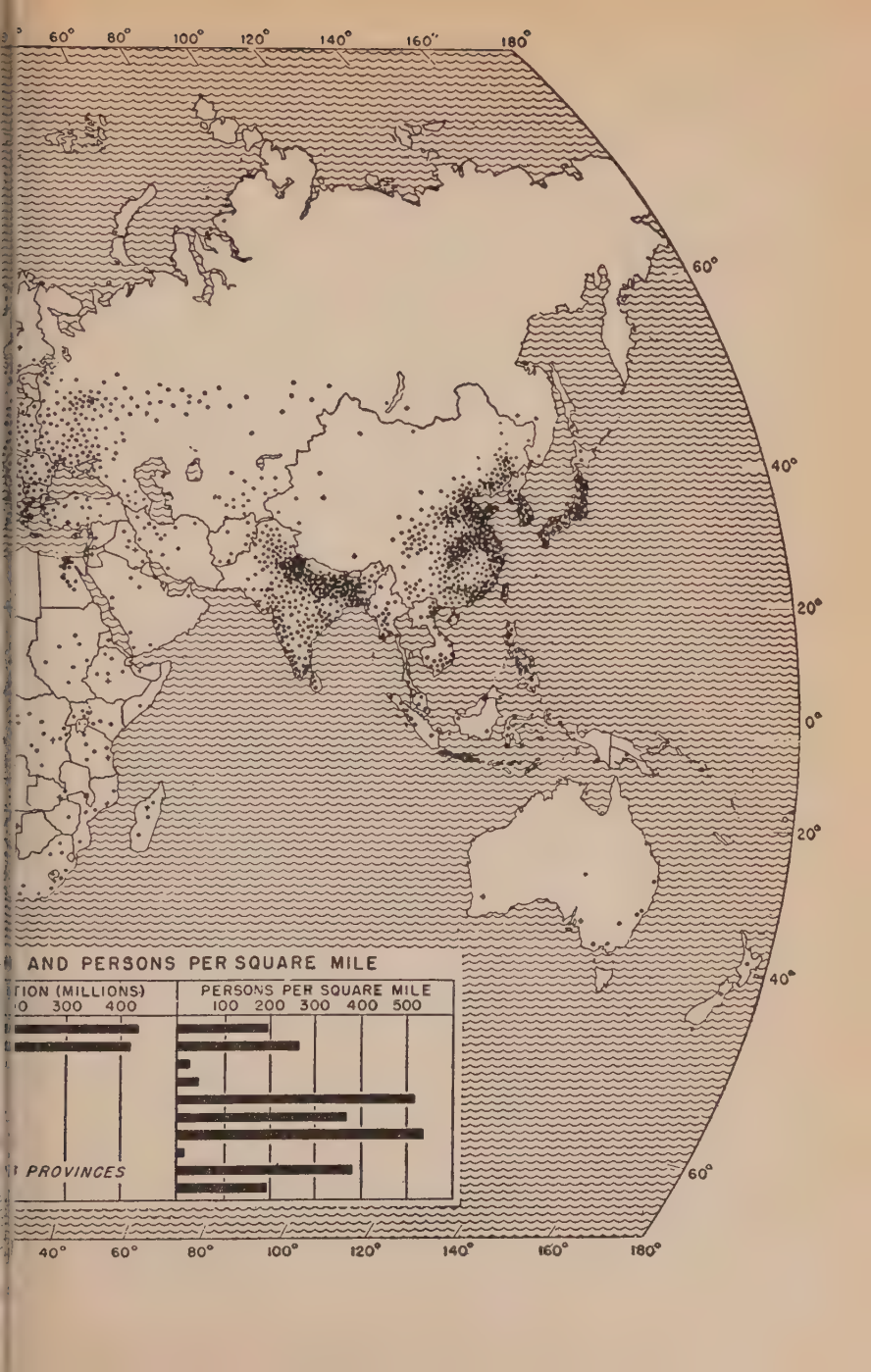
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MR. ACKERMAN: And yet the opinions of some eminent men in the Department of Agriculture of the United States are that it will be relatively easy to produce enough food to raise the standards of living.

MR. WHITE: But is their estimate not based on what could be done within technical limits? Do they not say that by applying well-known agricultural improvements to other parts of the world, better farming devices, and by spreading out into new lands, we might be able to do it? The question is whether we can do it with our present social organization.

MR. VOGT: If we look at the rest of the world, the probabilities of such development are not very bright. In the first place, our populations are increasing by fifty-five thousand hungry people a day. In nearly every part of the world, outside of Canada and Russia, forests are degenerating. Water tables are falling all over the world. Almost everywhere in the world grasslands are being degraded by overuse, as they are in 85 per cent of our range. Soil erosion is almost universal through the tropics. Wildlife is in a worse condition than these other resources.

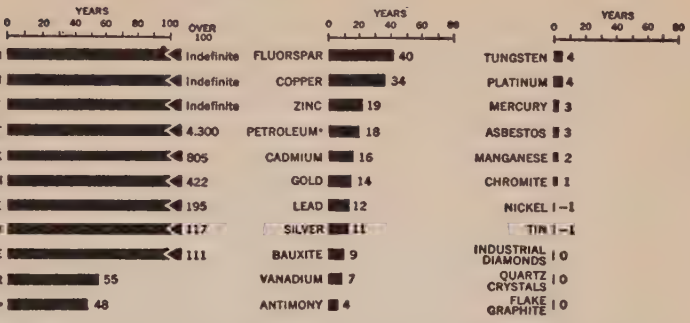
MR. WHITE: I think that we could get a little further in considering what we might, under the Truman program, do in other parts of the world if we tried to discuss particular areas. It is very difficult to generalize about the whole world. For example, if we take the question of population, we could divide the world into three types of regions. There is the region which is relatively underdeveloped and has a relatively small population. And then there are areas like India or China, where there is a tremendous population—the kind of population which a Duke University economist calls a "coiled" population.

MR. VOGT: Does he mean by that "coiled" in the sense of a rattlesnake?

MR. WHITE: It might be a rattlesnake in terms of the future of the world. He means that the life-expectancy in these areas is low and that the birth rate is high. Any improvement in the food supply will result in a decrease in the death rate and a tremendous increase in population. It can uncoil in a hurry.

MR. ACKERMAN: I would like to mention Japan in that connection. Japan is a country with which the United States is very much concerned at the present time, as it has been for the last few years. We have precisely that problem there, just as we have it in areas of China and India.

U.S. COMMERCIAL RESERVES OF CERTAIN MINERALS, 1940



Reprinted from Pearcy *et al., op. cit.* (from Elmer W. Pherson, "The Mineral Position of the United States and the Outlook for the Future," *Mining and Metallurgy,* April, 1945, p. 4).

* Based on proved reserves only.

Figures indicate quantitative significance of estimated reserves only and do not imply that the reserve could sustain consumption at the assumed rate for the period shown.

MR. WHITE: How are you dealing with that problem in Japan today? As I understand it, you have been over with MacArthur in the last month. What is the occupation force trying to do about it?

MR. ACKERMAN: Well, the occupation force is trying to produce as much food as possibly can be raised in Japan. They have not succeeded, up to the present time, even though the Japanese farmers and all Japanese have been very cooperative. Food production actually has risen since the end of the war, but there still is a considerable deficit. The United States is having to supply from its own production about 20 per cent, or a little more, of the Japanese food supply. And they are not living on any American standard of living as far as food is concerned. They have very near the bare subsistence necessary to maintain health.

MR. VOGT: What is the demographers' forecast for the population of Japan twenty-four years hence?

MR. ACKERMAN: There are varying estimates. Of course, in forecasting population there are so many imponderables that you cannot arrive at

any very accurate prediction. But we think that by 1970 there will be at least one hundred millions in Japan. There are eighty now, and there may in the future be as many as one hundred and fifteen million.

MR. WHITE: And yet Japan is one of the Far Eastern areas which has been relatively highly industrialized. We talk about areas like India and China, and say that unless they too can be industrialized, unless there can be very widespread social changes which would make for smaller families and a smaller birth rate, population in these areas will grow out of all proportion to resources. Can we expect that these populations will double as Japan has, or treble?

MR. ACKERMAN: Japan has actually trebled in population from 1870 until the present time. In 1870 Japan has about twenty-six million people, as nearly as we know; and now, as I mentioned, it has eighty. And it is not fully industrialized even at present. So I think that that shows the problem with which we have to deal in this matter of coiled population.

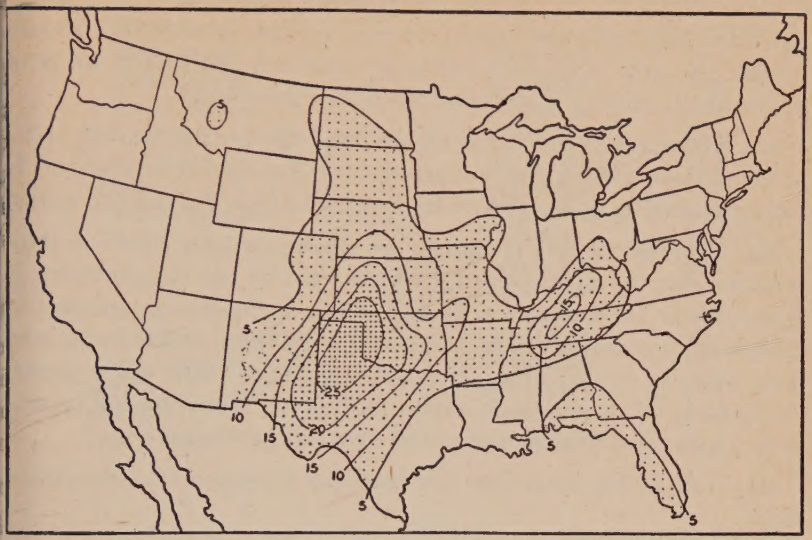
MR. VOGT: It seems to me, Ackerman, that that problem is a lot worse even than you suggested. Sir Henry Tizzard, at a recent meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, told of a thorough application of DDT to a suburb of Georgetown, British Guiana. It cut the death rate to such an extent that the population is increasing 10 per cent a year. In other words, it will double in ten years. Now, medical entomologists tell me that that kind of thing can be very cheaply done all over the world. Where does that leave us with our limited areas of land?

MR. ACKERMAN: Well, I would like to mention in this connection that, even though the population of Japan increased or trebled, the standard of living did rise from 1870 until just before the war. So there is a possibility that technology may outrun the increase in population. Some scientists, I understand, say that that may be true for some other areas.

MR. WHITE: Does that not suggest that our problem of helping underdeveloped areas across the world is in part a problem of technology and use of resources and that it is in part a problem of helping bring about a reduction in the birth rate and the change in the social system of the country which makes it possible and desirable to have smaller families and a more nearly stabilized population?

MR. VOGT: I think that that is certainly true, and that brings up the

GREAT PLAINS "DUST BOWL," APRIL, 1935



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This map shows the number of days with dusty conditions or dust storms during a dry month of a dry year.

problem of industrialization. I am not optimistic that there can be a widespread expansion of industry such as took place in the last fifty or seventy-five years, but there is certainly a tremendous need for industrialization and for the development of small industries in practically all these areas where they can use their own resources and their own labor force to take people off the land.

MR. WHITE: What about the Latin-American countries with which you have been dealing particularly, Vogt?

MR. VOGT: I think that there is a great opportunity there for small industries, but as long as they are broken up into small countries there are national boundaries and high tariffs, and there does not seem to be very much hope of developing a widespread industry.

MR. WHITE: I feel that we have, in these areas of coiled population, probably our greatest challenge. Can we make it possible from a humani-

tarian standpoint to prevent great disaster from famine and disease in those countries and thereby let this population begin to uncoil, and at the same time take such measures that we can preserve the already meager resources? Can we maintain a population which does not grow so fast that in effect it blows up in the face of the world?

MR. ACKERMAN: I think that we are decidedly getting into the realm of the unknown there. But it is certainly well worth an experiment. In their present state those areas certainly are sources of grave social unrest.

MR. VOGT: My feeling is that we are almost certainly licked in those areas but that we do have enough time so that we can do something in areas such as Latin America. Now, it looks at the present moment as though the population of Latin America is going to double in the next forty years, let us say. That, of course, is going to make vastly greater demands on resources—foods, timber, and so on. Would we not be wise to do a great deal of work there where we still have some time?

MR. WHITE: But would you just bottle up the populations in eastern Asia?

MR. VOGT: I think that they will take care of themselves by their own Malthusian mechanisms. It is not a happy prospect.

MR. ACKERMAN: But socially, I should say that it is a very unhappy prospect, and I wonder if it is one that we can afford to ignore.

MR. WHITE: I doubt whether the United States could and would stand by and see tremendous reductions in population through famine and disease if we felt that we had the technical means of preventing it.

MR. ACKERMAN: President Truman, as we have pointed out, has made a proposal for American action. We see that there are two types of areas where it might be carried out. How do the American people decide what to do? What should be our aim? What is involved if we decide upon action? White, will such programs exhaust or help the United States?

MR. WHITE: Well, I feel that they need not exhaust the United States; I think that whether we engage in such programs or not, unless we take much more vigorous steps for conservation of soils and forests and waters in the United States, we are going to have a declining resource base.

MR. VOGT: It seems to me that we cannot afford not to do it in the

WORLD POPULATION

Continent	Population	Density per Square Mile
NORTH AMERICA	158,974,000	20.0
UNITED STATES	128,429,000	43.2
CENTRAL AMERICA	6,949,000	31.4
WEST INDIES	12,864,000	141.0
SOUTH AMERICA	86,112,000	12.1
EUROPE (including U.S.S.R.)	558,779,000	55.1
UNITED KINGDOM	47,030,000	498.8
U.S.S.R.	170,500,000	20.9
ASIA	1,118,416,000	106.8
CHINA	466,786,000	103.7
INDIA	370,500,00	204.8
JAPANESE EMPIRE	99,457,000	381.6
NETHERLANDS INDIES	64,450,000	87.7
AFRICA	134,575,000	14.4
OCEANIA	8,434,000	2.8
WORLD TOTAL	2,095,000,000	41.0

All figures based on prewar estimates.

interest of world peace. We have a great opportunity to send technicians and know-how, books and scientific journals abroad. The State Department has been doing this on a modest scale for some time.

MR. WHITE: What about Latin America?

MR. VOGT: There was a very active program developed there under the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations, carried on and developed by the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, and since continued by the State Department and the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Costa Rica, supported by a group of American republics.

MR. WHITE: I think that I would sum up the problem in this way: From a technical standpoint we have enough natural resources in the world to supply the minimum needs of the present and prospective population—*if* the resources are utilized properly. Now, whether or not we realize that possibility, it seems to me, is primarily a race between population growth, on the one hand, and human inventiveness and social ingenuity, on the other. Do we have enough ingenuity to spread what we know and to adjust it in proper balance to each region?

MR. VOGT: I think that we definitely have. We have not even begun to develop the techniques of the social sciences, the means of changing

attitudes in this context. We have done a great deal through advertising. We have heard of the changes in attitudes of the Chinese, and so on. There are fundamental changes in points of view.

MR. ACKERMAN: In my opinion, we cannot hope to solve the world's population-resource problem at least within our lifetime, but that should not give us a philosophy of despair or of isolationism, as some people seem to have. I believe that, as the richest member of the world community, we are morally obligated to do what we can toward helping the less fortunate, and especially those who try sincerely to help themselves.

Furthermore, the world is buying time to find a solution to the problem of international peace. Assistance in resource development in foreign countries can be a lasting contribution in this direction. Even though the grave difficulties of the probable program are apparent, any farsighted person must consider the risks worth taking, for the reward can be great.